AESTHETIC COLLAPSE

ISSUE #1

This is the first issue of Aesthetic Collapse. There are no guidelines, only feelings, emotions, and intellectual curiosity. Forget your computer, and forget your phone. Take a walk, go outside, or better yet, read this zine while you do it! Please? Okay, now that this is out of the way, let us get down to business.

In Aesthetic Collapse, you will find old public domain obscurities, collage art pieces, photography, and philosophical ideas. Each of these interlacing aspects make up the totality of this zine, and I hope you also find it pleasant to experience.

I believe in xerox purity, photocopy worship, and subversive journalistic integrity. Let us enter into a new age of PHYSICAL MEDIA, where ART, and a LUST for living finally converge!

Like I said, there are no rules, no stipulations, and no caveats. The same goes for existential questions of any sort. All these things are fair game here.

In this issue there are three collage art pieces representing a unified theme of non-being. In addition, you will find a photographic montage accompanied by tableau-based poetry. And of course, a few philosophy articles written by me. Enjoy. Write. Read. Create. Explore. Get Feral.

Thomas Sheldon MacDonald

Editor

07/11/2026

Contact: thomas.sheldon.macdonald@protonmail.com

TABLE OF DISCONTENT

Tableau Poetry (p. 3-4)

Butoh Performance (p. 5-10)

1920’s blues and jazz (p. 11)

Hannah Arendt, and the Banality of Evil (p.12-13)

Black and White Photography Session (p 14-17)

The Torch Singer: Annette Hanshaw (p. 18-19)

Searching for Sin (p. 20-21)

Wine Reviews (p.22-23)

The Eroticism of Emotional Self-Immolation (24-26)

Shadow & Form: An Interview with Photographer Jeffrey P. MacDonald (27-28)

Quotes Worth Keeping (29)

Aesthetics, and Pain (30-31)

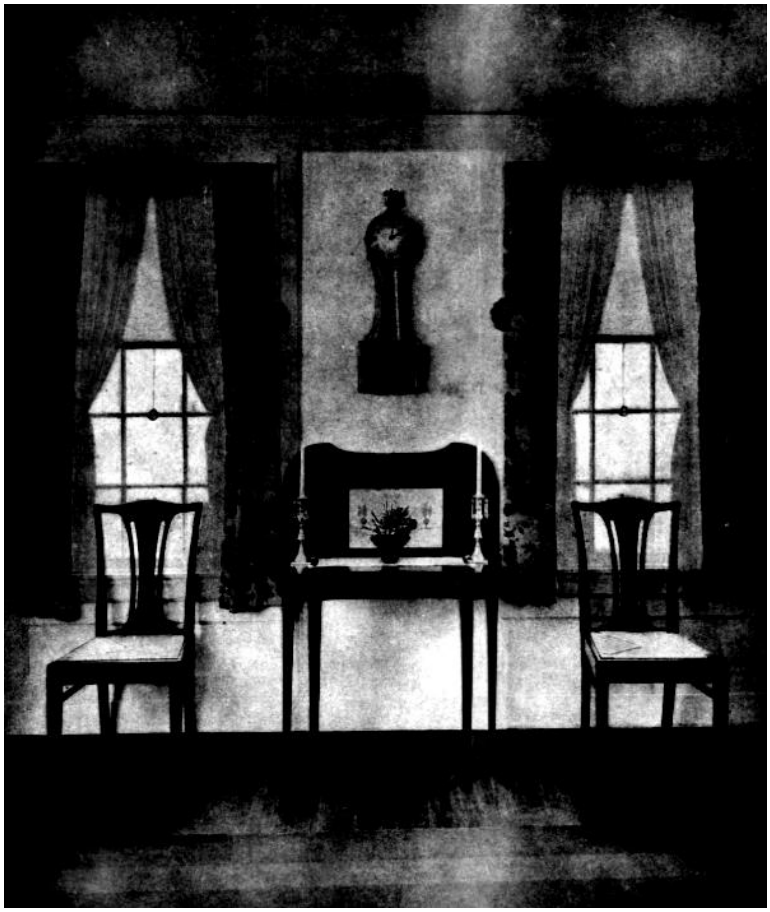
Weird Old Advertisement with no Context (32)

Religion or Death? (33-34)

The Collage Work of Thomas Sheldon MacDonald (35-37)

The Will as Shaped by the Oscillation (38-39)

Aesthetic Collapse (40)



Within the House

She saw his face, and how he

Looked when she peered out the window.

There was no laughter left in him.

He was abandoned, and

Utterly alone.

Mystery of the Curtains

Smoke filled the air in the

Small drawing room. There was

Some form of essence which

We were not familiar with. I

Loved to read there for

Hours in my melancholy.

Chains Erupted

A revolution of the markings

Of the wound of life

Confront me. I am covered

In chains of my own devise.

Nothing can erupt save

For the erotic engine of

Death burdening me.

It rides over my

Shoulder smoothly.

BUTOH PERFORMANCE

2023. Autumn. South Florida. The lights were blue, and the heat was intense. The only Butoh performance to be enacted as far as I was aware in the area. The play? The Tragedy of Birth.

Central to these concepts are that memories are conduits for expressing the dying experience. Inversion of birth, psychic warfare, and internal questioning becomes the source of liberation when suffering is almost irredeemable.

Butoh is a Japanese art form that is post-modern in nature. It is a dance theatre art - darkness, light, emotion, rupture, and awareness of death being central to understanding this path.

Joy exists here as well, but it is in the form of intensity that grabs you on a fundamentally primitive level.

No one needs to view a Butoh performance, but 10 people did when I enacted this installation when it happened. Those who were witness to it were witness to a form of erupting self-annihilation of the psyche. Kazuo Ohno, and Tatsumi Hijikata were pioneers of this art form, which is so obscure, and off the beaten path.

Below are images that chronicle the chaos, beautiful pain, and horrifying joy of ecstasy!

1920s blues and jazz

Thomas’s Top 10 of Issue 1

+

1. Annette Hanshaw – Get out and Get under the Moon
2. Marion Harris – Jazz Vampire
3. Ruth Etting – Ten Cents a Dance
4. Isham Jones – Wabash Blues
5. Elsie Clark – Cry Baby Blues
6. The Havana Band at the Savoy Hotel – Tell Me With a Melody
7. Ethel Waters – Dinah
8. Edwin J. McEnelly & His Orchestra – Blame It On the Waltz
9. Al Bowlly – If Anything Happened to You
10. Carl Fenton’s Orchestra – Midnight Waltz

HANNAH ARENDT & The Banality of E V I L

Hannah Arendt was a visionary, a human being, profoundly wounded, deep, expressive, and the result of her times in many ways. She was revolutionary in her ideas of how to deconstruct society at its core levels.

Hannah in 1924

Arendt saw through the truth behind the fascistic rise of power in Europe during the earlier part of the 20th century. According to her, fascists, and those who participate in socio-economic disparity/asymmetry engage in a banality which is not merely evil alone. It is hum-drum, every day, commonplace, and thoroughly disturbing in its ordinariness.

With that said, it is clear that during her life she formulated ideological, and dialogue-based philosophical works which illustrated just how ordinary evil could be.

It is with her writings that we see the collapse of the modern era into post-modernism, especially during the trials of Eichmann in Jerusalem after WWII.

Her contemporaries were giants of thought; Emil Cioran, Simone de Beauvoir, Sartre, Camus, and the like. Her ideas were highly sociologically informed, but at the same time held an existential weight which is to this day uncanny.

Some of her works include The Origins of Totalitarianism, and The Human Condition. Yes, she delved into political theory, but this was inextricably tied in with existentialism in a massively important way. You see, Arendt did not only document her times, but she followed a trajectory of personal-liberation that involves a lived philosophy rather than just theory alone.

She did not exist in some ivory tower, but made her work palpably felt throughout Western society at large. Through studying her work, we are able to have a more nuanced understanding of where we are headed now. By this, I mean that her work, coupled with college-level prep in the psychology of genocide, provides a stabilizing view of a very unstable world.

Black and White Photography Session:

The Burial Ground, and Nature Collapsing

By Thomas MacDonald

The Torch Singer

Annette Hanshaw

October 18, 1901 - March 13, 1985

Annette Hanshaw was a singer most well known for her sultry, and emotional register. Her musical talent did not just extend to the jazz world, but also to early blues. With songs like “Am I Blue”, “Get Out and Get Under the Moon”, she was catapulted to notoriety due to her singular voice. When we think of all the artists that have

influenced the world around us, Hanshaw was one of those few that didn't quite get the final curtain call that she deserved. Of course, this is not a phenomenon that is unknown throughout the history of popular music.

Other artists from the period such as Ethel Waters, or Ruth Etting, are known, but not as well as they used to be. It's nice to be able to hear the early combinations of melancholy, sadness, and faint hope that colored her musical art.

She did not want to be merely a blues or a jazz singer, but someone that could fill a diverse range of musical roles without apologizing for it. Hanshaw always kept her songs well-rounded, varied in number, and relatively short for her time (many are under 3 minutes in length).

If you want to get into her music, it is possible to find her vinyl recordings from the 1920's through the usual channels. Her work is a rare combination of sensuality, subtlety, and, at times, joy.

In her later years, she claimed she did the recording of her body of work out of necessity, rather than an interest in the songs themselves. She did not have a positive view of her own work in retrospect, which is not uncommon of artists who work out of desperation, necessity, and a desire to carve out one's own place in the world.

Searching for Sin

By: Thomas Sheldon MacDonald

“In the obscurity that at present shrouds the theory of instinct, we shall certainly not do well to reject any idea that promises to throw light. We have made the antithesis between the life and death instincts our point of departure. Object-love itself displays a second such polarity, that of love (tenderness) and hate (aggression). What if we could succeed in bringing these two polarities into relation with each other, in tracing the one to the other!” - Sigmund Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle

Hatred, and love are oscillatory forces which bend like reeds in the wind of causal nature. Complex emotions, ideas, thoughts, and planes of existence force us to encounter ourselves on an authentic level. This level, inclusive of primitive desires of the flesh, goes beyond sensory fulfillment into the realm of the aesthetic. By cultivating an awareness of death through introspection, the individual is able to see the chains that bind them.

Awareness is key. Yet, this is not mere mystical jargon to ruminate about. What I am prescribing is merely to evaluate life authentically from a scientific, rational, and grounded world view. Aesthetics are there to show us how awareness shapes our desires in a fundamentally outward-facing manner.

We cannot continue to lie to ourselves regarding the power of emotional states. Our ideas concerning personal awareness crumble before us when we realize just how little control we have over our base emotions. I must insert a caveat here; to explain better, what I am saying is that cerebral chemicals, circumstance, chance (yes, even this), and socio-economic viability all determine how we react to outside stimuli. This is especially true if our basic needs are not met. Still, there are ways in which individuals (including myself) can recognize those figurative chains that we wear, even if we cannot take them off.

Why is it that I am bringing all of this up in this article? It is simple. Let us wash away all the complex terminology for a moment, and lay our eyes on the fact that we are all mortal. Someday we too shall die, and though this is a basic biological fact, we still cannot wrap our heads around it.

Madness is not just repetition. It is rumination, lust, grief, torn emotions, and a lack of power castrating us from the inside out. Freud makes a powerful point in that instinct becomes our substrate when we collapse mentally from the fact that we too shall die. Remember death? Yes, absolutely. No one sits on an ivory throne for more than circumstance will allow them to. Keep that in mind. I know I will. Bummer.

WINE REVIEWS

Louis Jadot Beaujolais Villages Red Wine 2024

This wine is one of my personal favorites. Why, you might ask? Because it is heavy, but not too heavy, and it’s also crisply blended. Think of heavier spiced flavors mixed with an unmistakable finish. 8.5/10

Apothic Red Blend 2026

Heavier tannins are here, along with a red-currant, and tart fruit-based palate wash. Think about heavier meals, or just something to settle in with to sip, and enjoy. 7.0/10

Bend White Zinfandel 2026

This one is crisp, not overbearing, and genuinely delightful. I would have to say that if you give this one a chance, you will find that, though it is on the lower end of the price spectrum, it is quite excellent. Consider pairing this with brunch, or a simple evening cocktail party. 6.5/10

Château d'Esclans Rock Angel Rosé 2022

Notes of light, and medium-bodied fruits. Pair this with a light meal, but if you can, serve with appetizers or finger foods. 9.0/10

Louis Latour Beaune Blanc 2023

This is a light Chardonnay from Beaune, Cote de Beaune, Cote d'Or, Burgundy, France. Notes of light berries with mild refreshing citrus (not heavy though). Perfectly paired with a Summer, or Autumn light supper. Goes great with asparagus, and any other side seasonal vegetable that isn't too spicy. 8.5/10

"My living room is here shown, with its all-over floor covering. The walls are gray."

The Eroticism of Emotional Self-Immolation

“The fact that authors reveal more than they intend and that that which is revealed is an objective product directly related to the life of the writer is a factor of recognized psychological determination. Instead of literature being flooded with foolish, meaningless and purposeless verse or prose, which is the written expression of the literary man, it can be demonstrated that no expression, however trifling it may appear on the surface, is unmotivated.” - FREDERIC J. FARNELL, EROTISM AS PORTRAYED IN LITERATURE. The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis. Vol. 1 December 1920.

It is true, at least for me, that my thoughts as a writer reveal more about me on paper than in speech. There is a psychological element of anguish to my work, especially in my most recent book Essay on Self-Awareness and Despair. What I am trying to say here is that I cannot personally escape the unconscious aspects of emotional deregulation.

To be more concise (which is the goal here); art or literature engages with me on a primitive level. I wrestle with thoughts, ideas, concepts, etc. precisely because I cannot make full sense of the world around me.

Thus far, I have only spoken about myself, but I would like to extend this conversation to the general concept of humanity overall. There is a taboo to what I am going to

posit here; and that is that humanity is subject to a fatal desire toward mental annihilation on a sublimated level.

I do not mean annihilation in the physical sense, but in the psychological form of the matter. By being honest, and really observing the world around us, we see that despair, and eroticism, are intertwined profoundly. Eroticism here is not sexuality in the sense of the traditional idea regarding it. No, it is simply an enthusiastic acceptance of the wound in humanity as it exists right now.

We are like paintings of some strange forgotten gods. We are depicted symbolically as mortally wounded upon a luxurious, and sumptuous landscape of our own demise. Decadence through despair is the culprit here.

By decadence – and I mean this seriously – I am seeing that the world encroaches upon the artist in a sensorial, and enigmatic fashion. Death, eroticism, and self-awareness often go hand in hand. Again, this is not physical death, physical eroticism, or anything that is other than a mental exercise through constructs of the mind.

In the end, we must be aware that our instinctual nature is not obsolete by a long shot. We clutch at our breasts, and feel the psychic wound festering as we slowly descend into the awareness of our lowliness in the flesh.

Shadow & Form

An Interview with professional photographer

Jeffrey P. MacDonald

“Bench” 2026

1. Introduce me to your art. What is the overall base concept.

Officially what I practice is a sort of post-industrial topographic humanist. Most of the time, I’m practicing urban street photography. I’m not the kind to chase decisive moments. I typically am static and let world come to me. My interest is in what I call The Forgotten. I get

down to the level of inanimate objects, disconnected alarm bells, empty benches, garbage bins. I give dignity to objects other people ignore.

2. Equipment? Preferences?

My equipment currently is an Olympus OM-D E-M10 Mark IV with a Panasonic 25mm f1.7. I prefer Olympus/OM-SYSTEM because the m4/3 sensor allows for a light, enjoyable camera.

3. How do you use light and shadow to your advantage?

As a monochrome artist, light and shadow are at the forefront of what I do. The contrast of the two create an interior, psychological, dream-like state that color cannot reproduce.

4. If you could use one piece of equipment what would it be?

The single piece of equipment I would use is a Leica Monochrom.

5. What is the purpose of creating meaning for you?

The purpose of creating meaning for me is to make the most of my life. To leave this place with no regrets. To leave a legacy that will long outlive me.

6. If you could create an installation piece right now what would it be?

An art installation I would consider would be a picture of a bench in a party, a roped off area, and a sign that says please take a seat. The picture of the bench would be hanging at eye level. The same bench they are sitting on would be the bench in the picture. The bench would be in a park on an overcast day.

“Bonsai” 2026

Quotes Worth Keeping

"The need to go astray, to be destroyed, is an extremely private, distant, passionate, turbulent truth." - Georges Bataille.

“I feel completely detached from any country, any group. I am a metaphysically displaced person.” - Emil Cioran.

“The sign of doom is written on your brows.”- Peter Wessel Zapffe.

"Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes." - Carl Jung.

Aesthetics, and Pain

“To her then made answer Dione, the fair goddess: “Be of good heart, my child, and endure for all your suffering; for many of us who have dwellings on Olympus have suffered at the hands of men, while bringing grievous woes on one another.” The Iliad, Homer.

Suffering has a place in aesthetics because it has existed with us since ancient times in this context. The mystery plays of ancient Greece are testimony to this, as well as carvings in various cultural artifices depicting men, and women on the receiving end of a cruel, twisted fate. The architecture of suffering is such that whole empires have been founded upon the backs of those who are down-trodden, and toil without recompense.

We can argue that our current societal empires are still stomping upon us with shiny techno-bureaucratic boots. Our labor is being swindled away, and it always has been. This is the way of humanity. But I digress - let us return to the topic at hand. Suffering and aesthetics are one whether we like it or not. All of society has been created through the sweat of the brow of the innocent. Blood is upon the walls of baroque architecture, through today’s brutalist/soulless architecture.

There is an irony to all this, however, and it is that though we all loathe to admit it to ourselves, we

participate in our own palette of suffering through ignoring those chains to which we are bound. Civilizations are asymmetrical in nature. We deny the truth of this fact. We also, as a collective, deny ourselves the acceptance of the truth that we are always surrounded by pain. This is unfortunate, but it makes art, fashion, and the audio-visual more striking because of it.

This striking nature is one in which we are immersed fully in the artist's vision of suffering in whatever medium that might be in. When we visualize the suffering depicted in art, or the subtle anguish expressed through stitched fabric, we then can synthesize this into ourselves. This synthesis is one in which empathy plays a monumental role.

Empathy keeps us grounded in that we are cognizant that we owe it to ourselves as well as others to feel genuine emotional architecture maturing, and developing within us. The profundity of art is that its beauty lies not specifically in the calm, or pastoral, but in the edges of experience itself.

When art translates into emotional development, we can then gravitate towards empathic thought. This awareness is built up through intentionality of experience. The individual no longer simply views a painting, or listens to a song, but becomes a participant in the interwoven tapestry of suffering as it is manifested in this world.

Weird Old Advertisement

With no Context

STAMMER

If you stammer attend no stammering school until you get my large FREE BOOK entitled

"STAMMERING
Its Origin and the
Advanced Natural Method of Cure"

Bound in cloth and stamped in pure gold.

Ask for special tuition rate and a FREE copy of "The Natural Speech Magazine." Largest, best equipped and most successful school in the world for the cure of stammering, stuttering and other speech impediments. Conducted under the best approved NATURAL METHODS, no sing-song or time-beat. A school of highest character and moral standing. Write today for further particulars.

LEE WELLS MILLARD, President
The North-Western School, 2309 Grand Ave., Milwaukee, Wis.

Have a Clear Skin

Don't be embarrassed by Pimples, Blackheads, Eczema, Red Nose, Greasy Skin, etc.

Klearskin DOES what others claim to do. Send $1.00 today for bottle —check, money order, cash or stamps.

KLEARSKIN INSTITUTE
Dept. T, 100 N Eutaw St.
Baltimore, Md.

FREE DIAMOND RING OFFER

Just to advertise our famous Hawaiian im. diamonds--the greatest discovery the world has ever known. We will send absolutely free this 14k gold f. ring, set with a 1-2k Hawaiian im. diamond--in beautiful ring box postage paid. Pay postmaster $1.48 C. O. D. charges to cover postage, boxing, advertising, handling, etc. If you can tell it from a real diamond return and money refunded. Only 10,000 given away. Send no money. Answer quick. Send size of finger.

KRAUTH & REED DEPT. 78
MASONIC TEMPLE, CHICAGO.

Religion or Death?

Conviction is not as horrifying as the prospect of death. Death is the ultimate spiritual taboo because it represents the negation of all things extant in our lives. It literally is the absence of that which we knew to be ourselves. Religion can bring insight, no doubt, but this I fear may distract one from recognizing the ultimate truth of biological decay, and putrefaction.

When we look at the world around us, it becomes quickly apparent that there is a remarkable asymmetry between what we would consider good, or evil. To expand on this, I am saying that from the lowliest of animals such as lizards, birds, and other small creatures we see a destruction which is readily observable in nature.

Small animals kill other animals for food, birds displace other birds in a struggle for resources, and humans kill one another sometimes without an afterthought. Evil, therefore, is universal.

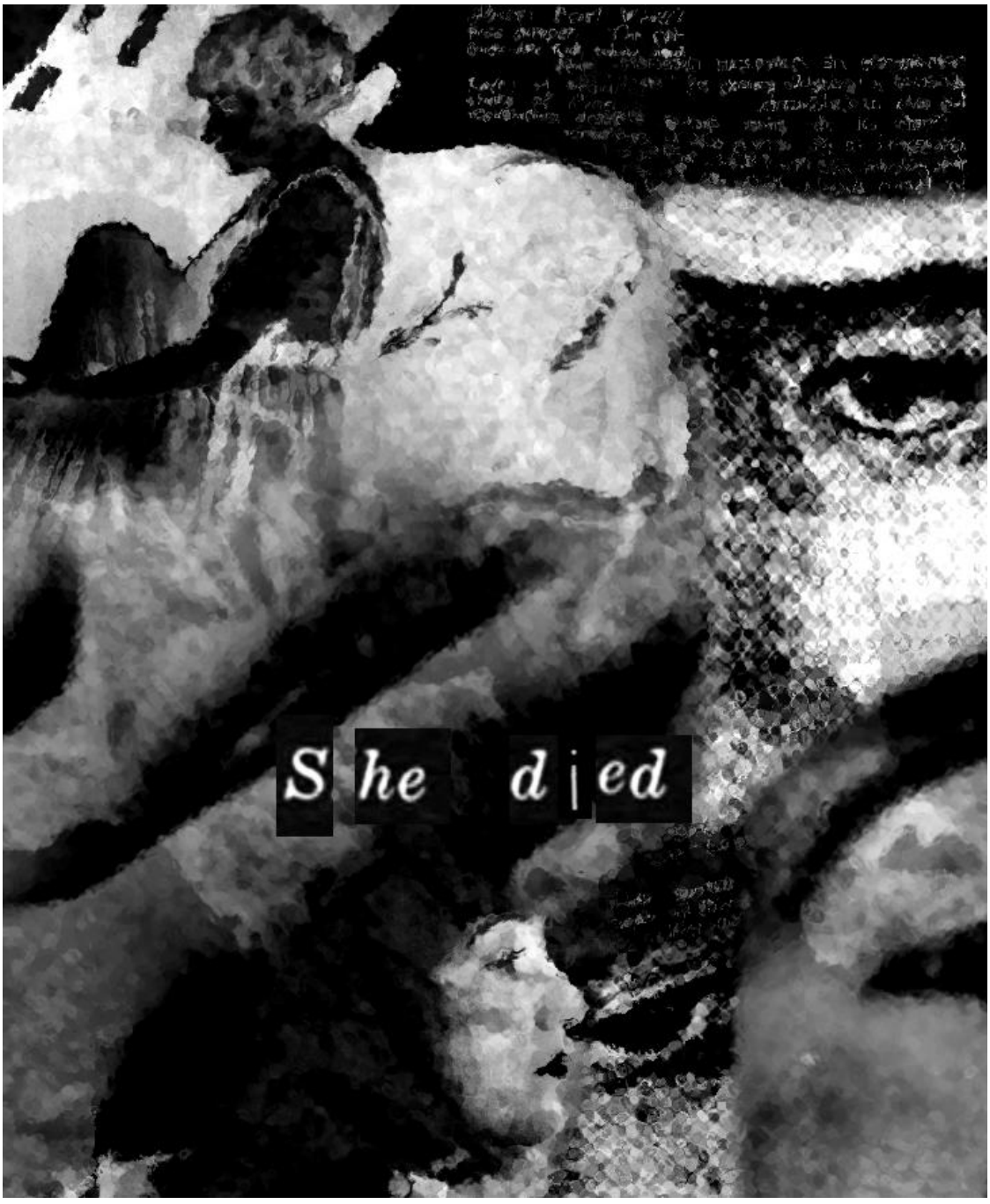
Everywhere we go we can make a connection between a sort of universality to the understanding that there is death all around us. Whatever language is spoken, whatever custom is enacted or ritualized; all these things present an ecumenism of being. The central force behind our universal thought patterns regarding asymmetry are death-focused, and deep-rooted.

In The Psychology of Jung, James Oppenheim states plainly that “In short, the unconscious contains typical images and typical stories.” We are not so different from one another as we might first suppose. Our manner of ritualization might vary tremendously, but the core fact of death awareness is at the basis of all things. It is the substrate in fact, because the observable reality is that death is a biological feature that is wholly visible, and at the heart of human experience.

Religion does not cover up death-awareness but projects it loudly through customs, rites, and emotionally shared states of psychological union with one another. There is a dichotomy between our understanding of death, and our ritualization of it. This dichotomy is most apparent if we see through the thinly-veiled doctrinal assumptions of any belief system.

Our ancestors paved the way for our understanding of reality through shared symbolism. This is not unique to any one culture. This symbolism comes to us through the unconscious, and it allows us to realize our fears concerning our mortality. Furthering this idea, Oppenheim goes on to state concisely that “Dreams, in short, are symbolic. Everything in a dream stands for something else. But these symbols are not haphazard; what they stand for are definitely expressed by the symbol.” Religion or death? Maybe both influence us more than we might think.

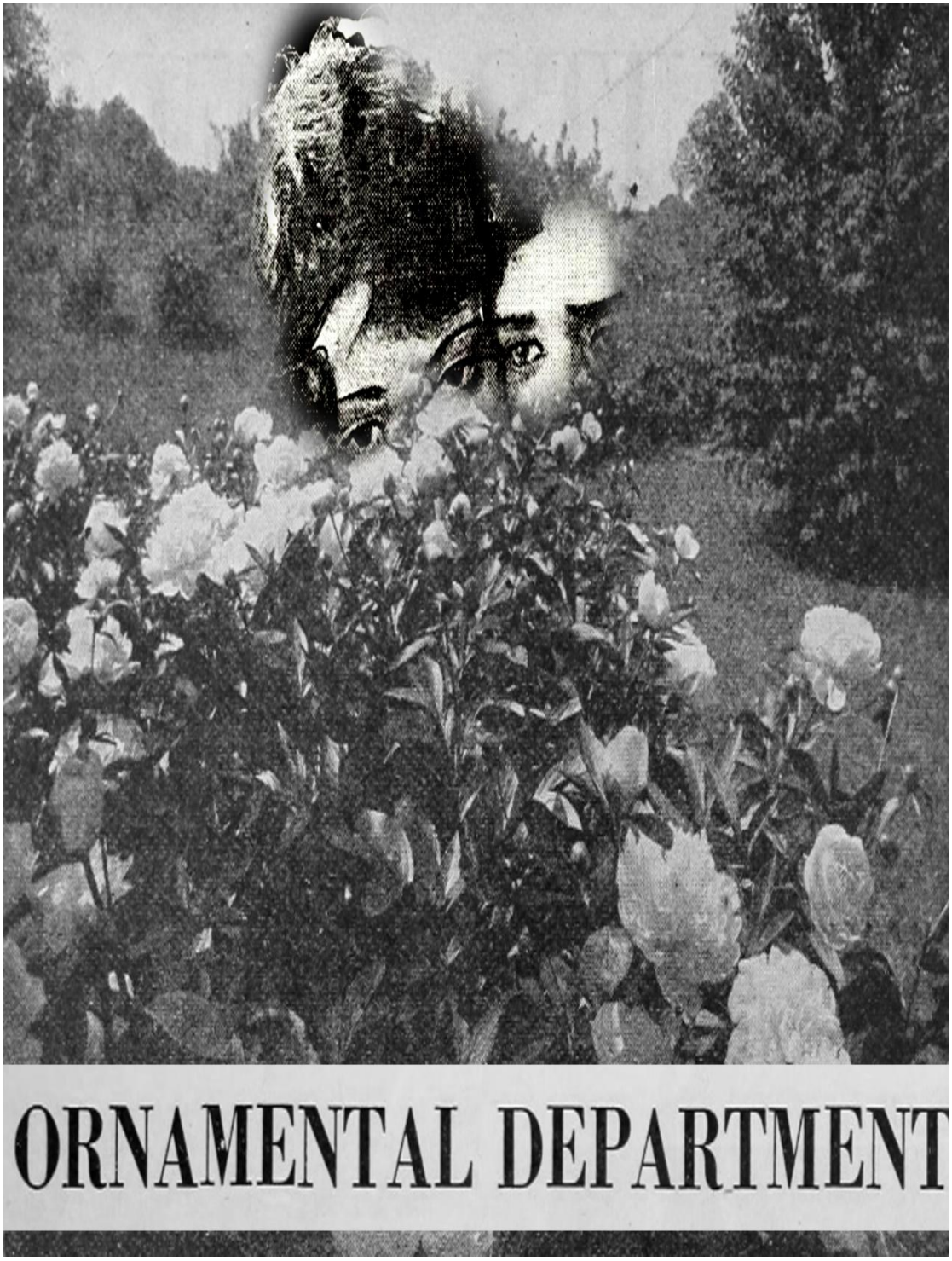
The Collage Work of Thomas Sheldon MacDonald



“She Died”

Mixed Media/Collage

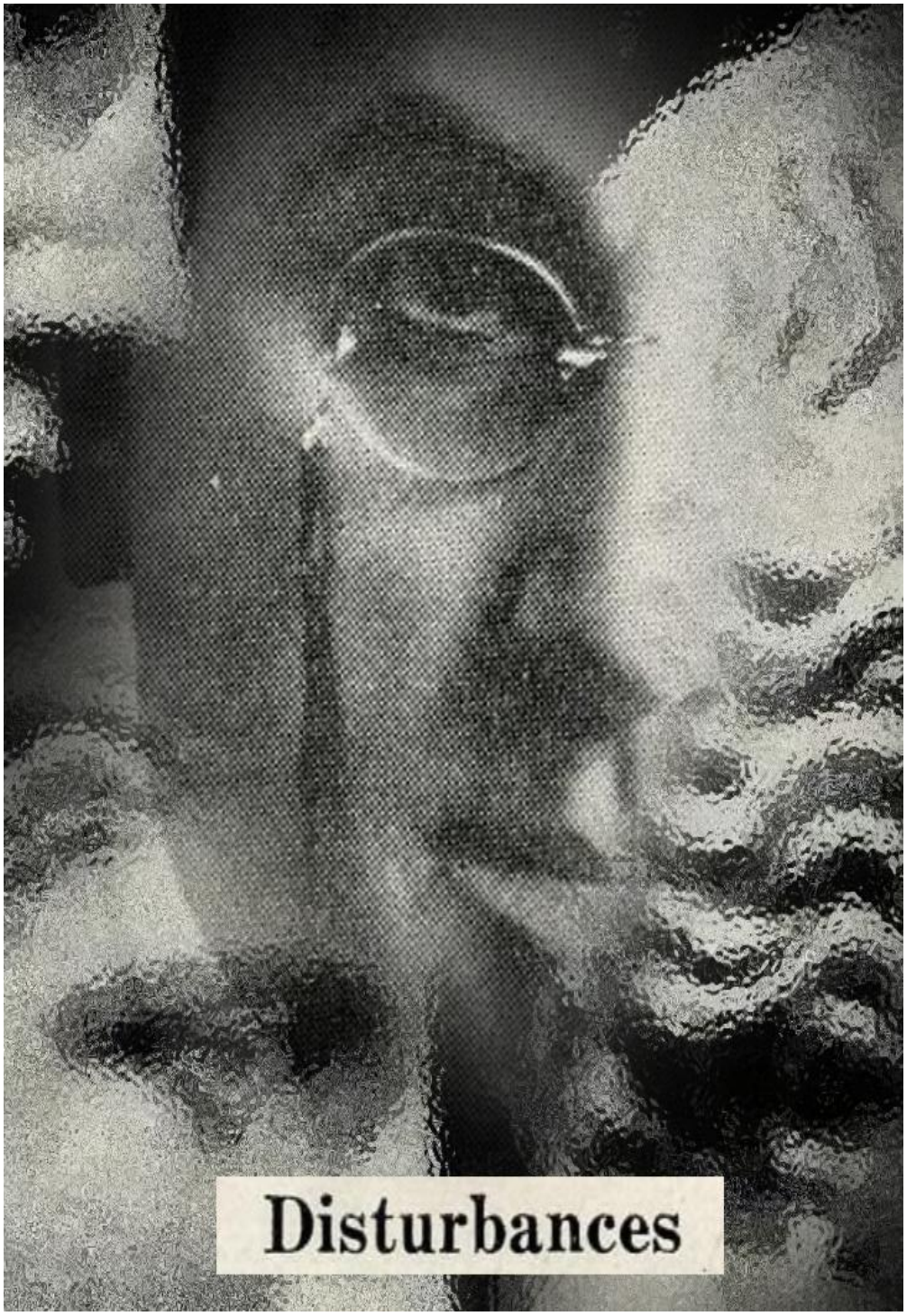
2026



“Ornamental Department”

Mixed Media/Collage

2026



“Disturbances”

Mixed Media/Collage

2026

The Will as Shaped by the Oscillation

Our needs are instinctually based on something primal within all of us. The Will, which is the source of this desire, shows its awful power throughout every individual moment of joy or agony. Of this, I will not elaborate because I would not presume knowing the depths of feeling which is beyond my bodily awareness.

With that said, I can interpret what I understand of my own desires into a system that makes sense to me. Let us entertain for a moment that everything we know is based on patterns. These patterns are like oscillatory waves rebounding from a substrate underneath it which carries the entirety of all things extant.

Let us call this substrate non-being. When non-being erupts momentarily, a scaffolding of consequence takes place whereby the oscillatory nature of all things becomes apparent. I am at a different wavelength oscillation than say a table, but the differences end there. I am similar to the table because though I refuse to designate myself as an object, but a pattern, both the table and I oscillate, nonetheless.

The will is shaped by this oscillation because it is inextricably tied in with the absence of being. Non-being, or the Void, is representational of something that is beyond contemporary, or antiquated language to describe.

It can be visualized as an ocean, but in reality is of nascent non-substantive substratum beyond our comprehension or control.

Our willingness to allow ourselves to be sublimated by the desires of the flesh are such that we are blinded from birth instinctually to anything else. This is not to say that we lack empathy, which is a condition that is outside the purview of this discussion. What I am saying, however, is that the Will is so primitive that any conceptualization of it only makes sense when we stop assigning arbitrary meaning to things.

We eventually die, and our desires fade into total obscurity in the eternal night of the abyss. This is okay, because if we understand the nature of the oscillation, we can grant ourselves a modicum of peace. We may not live forever, but we are all of the underlying substrate. This substrate is unspeakable, because it is outside of the causal realm of knowledge. Yet, it is of one nature with all things.

This effectively makes the substrate condition Monist in the sense that there is no outside world other than what we see before us. The beyond is simply what exists here, and now, but outside of our primitive conditions of knowledge. The acausal, and causal, are thus one, and the same. Our will must be observed, but it is one with the acausal substratum.

AESTHETIC COLLAPSE

+